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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE
SAME: SL CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: 08 FREETOWN 524

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 27, the long-anticipated Cabinet reshuffle was announced, putting an end to months of media speculation. Government contacts had been reporting possible reshuffles since before the President's inauguration anniversary in November (reftel), but Emboffs had been told that President Koroma was waiting to make an announcement until all decisions had been finalized, and that weighing each Minister's performance was a lengthy process. The reshuffle offered few surprises, with Koroma's noted cronies remaining in powerful positions, and some of the underwhelming performers outside his circle transferred to lesser Ministries or fired. The PMDC party Cabinet members are reportedly threatening to resign in protest following their own demotions and the firing of other PMDC ministers. Civil society groups and members of the opposition party have already made statements against the reshuffle, arguing that the Cabinet is now more regionally biased than before, expressing concern that Koroma fired a female minister, which reduced women's representation on the Cabinet by a third, and stating that some of the decisions appear to be political, rather than performance-driven. These criticisms are well-founded, but will likely not trouble the President -- the purpose of the reshuffle exercise appears to be one of smoke and mirrors, designed to demonstrate to the citizens that the President is a man of action. The reasoning behind the changes, and the consequences that will likely be their result, are less important than the act of change itself. An informal poll of a cross-section of the public and civil servants revealed that this is an apt hypothesis. End Summary.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: KOROMA REWARDS LOYALTY

¶2. (C) As expected, Koroma kept those known to be close to him, as well as party stalwarts, in positions of power. Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura, who has been lambasted in the press recently due to a perception of inactivity, kept her position. Defense Minister Palo Conteh, also no stranger to bad press and controversy, also retained his post. Abdul Serry-Kamal, though seen as an enemy of the President, will remain as Attorney-General based on the strength of his support within the APC party. Other Koroma allies include Dauda Kamara and Ibrahim Kargbo, who will stay as Ministers of Internal Affairs and Information, respectively.

¶3. (C) Other loyal supporters of the President now find themselves repositioned, but still seated at the Cabinet table. Haja Afsatu Kabba, former Minister of Energy, now wears the Marine Resources mantle, replacing the former minister, Dr. Moses Kapu, who has been too ill in recent months to serve in his position. Though it was no surprise that Kabba was removed from Energy, where she presided over several large, unethical procurements, her move to Marine

Resources shocked some. Detractors worry that she has been placed in charge of a portfolio that has huge revenue-generating potential, given her corrupt reputation. The former Minister of Finance, David Carew, once seemed especially close to the President. However, recent rumors of him stealing from the government's coffers likely resulted in his transfer to the less-esteemed position of Minister of Trade and Industry. Carew has been replaced by Bank Governor Samura Kamara, a known ally of the President, while the former Minister of Trade, Alimamy Koroma, has been relegated to the Works Ministry. Former Minister of Presidential Affairs, Alpha Kanu, is now helming the Ministry of Mineral Resources. This is considered a lucrative ministry, and Kanu has the requisite experience and the confidence of the President to steer the sector which appears poised on the cusp of a resurgence. The former Mineral Resources Minister, Abu Bakarr Jalloh, was fired outright, likely because of rumors that he has skimmed significant benefits from recently negotiated mining concessions.

DROPPING THE OUTSIDERS AND "UNDERPERFORMERS"

14. (C) Koroma fired five ministers, including Haja Musu Kandeh (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs), Benjamin Davies (Lands), John Saad (Works), as well as the previously-mentioned Kapu (Marine Resources) and Bakarr Jalloh (Mineral Resources). The firings are the primary cause of controversy surrounding the reshuffle, because they impacted one of the few women in Cabinet as well as PMDC representation. With respect to Kandeh, even her

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strong APC ties could not save her from being axed. She was never known to be close to the President, and her leadership of the Ministry has yielded no appreciable results. She has often been criticized by UNICEF for her lack of interest and action, which probably reached the ears of the President. Though the Ministry is in many ways incapacitated by a large mandate and tiny budget, her lack of enthusiasm and drive is well-documented and has been criticized by many regardless of their political affiliation. Kandeh's departure is not a surprise, but what is surprising is that no other women were brought into the fold. Now only two women sit in the Cabinet, which is a great disappointment to civil society and women's political groups.

15. (C) The PMDC has lost considerable ground in this iteration of the Cabinet. Three of the five fired ministers -- Davies, Saad, and Kapu -- are PMDC representatives, and only Soccoh Kabia remains of the original cohort of PMDC ministers. Kabia, however, has effectively been demoted from the Ministry of Health to Social Welfare. Though the PMDC has been losing steam since the local elections in July, 2008, pundits expected Koroma to maintain the PMDC Cabinet representation promised to them when they formed the coalition that ensured Koroma's victory in the Presidential run-offs in 2007. The press is already circulating rumors that the PMDC ministers, including Dennis Sandi, Davies' replacement in the Ministry of Lands, will resign in protest on March 5. The one PMDC Deputy Minister, Sylvester Hanciles of Transportation and Aviation, intends to resign as well.

16. (C) Discussions of performance have been given short shrift since the reshuffle, with the State House press release that announced the changes failing to address the reasoning and justification behind them. While Kandeh was a known underperformer, the other fired Ministers were, by all accounts, acquitting themselves well in their positions. Saad in particular was known to be an effective manager, and the others rarely received bad press. The media is thus reporting the PMDC oustings as political in nature, designed to make room for more of Koroma's allies and/or enhance regional representation from the north, Koroma's stronghold. Post cannot confirm at this time if rumors of further regionalism

based on these appointments have validity.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

17. (C) Little information is currently available on the new Cabinet members, though post is currently creating their biographic files. The new Presidential Affairs Minister, Joseph Koroma, is the country representative of UNIDO. Dr. Samura Kamara, Minister of Finance, was a former Financial Secretary within the Ministry, as well as a former World Bank employee. Ogunlade Davidson, Chairman of the Environmental Protection Agency and now the Minister of Energy and Water Resources, is a renowned scientist with particular expertise in climate change. A former Fulbrighter, he is Head of the Post-Graduate Department at Fourah Bay College. Dennis Sandi, Minister of Lands, received his doctorate degree in Germany and has lectured at Fourah Bay College for the past six years. Post is gathering information on Sheku Tejan Koroma, Minister of Health.

COMMENT

18. (C) Predicting the cabinet reshuffle has practically been a national pasttime in recent months, and Koroma could have ill-afforded to wait much longer before his leadership credibility was questioned due to what many began to see as a lack of will to hold his ministers accountable for their actions and inactions. While he removed one notably ineffective minister, Haja Musu Kandeh, other ineffective and even corrupt officials remain in positions of power, such as Haja Afsatu Kabba and David Carew. Though potentially Koroma's strongest statement in his selections was the demotion of Carew to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, demonstrating that he will go only so far to protect his friends, he has not taken as firm a stand against corruption as post would hope to see. Still, his failure to place disgraced former Minister of Transport and Aviation, Ibrahim Kemoh Sesay, in a new Cabinet position shows his understanding that there are limits to political pay-back (Note: It is possible Kemoh Sesay will receive a new position once the ongoing cocaine trial, in which he was implicated, closes. End Note). Post will provide further information septel, as more details and public reactions become available. An informal poll of a variety of individuals,

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however, indicated that the majority are happy that Koroma took action, and are less concerned about the contents of that action or the possible political ramifications. End Comment.
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